

Jesus' Arrival, Simeon's Departure

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[0 : 00] I'd like us just for a wee while to turn back to Luke 2 and we'll read again verses 27-32. And Simeon came in the spirit into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God saying, Lord, now you're letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

We're all very much looking forward to Christmas Day in just a few days time, which is always a very exciting and happy time of year for us. And it's a time when we think and remember Jesus' arrival.

This is the time of year when we go back to the Bible's record of the birth of Jesus. And we remember all the amazing things that took place there.

And there's so much to rejoice in when we think of Jesus' arrival. He's come to be the saviour of sinners. He's come to fulfil all the promises of God's word.

[1 : 22] And he's come to give hope to all who come to him in faith. So there's so much that's wonderful about Jesus' arrival.

And at Christmas time, that's what we think about. We spend a lot of time thinking about Jesus' arrival. And that's great and wonderful.

But what I want us to recognise today is that at this time of year, we're thinking about Jesus' arrival. And that's good.

But all of the time, Jesus is thinking about your departure. The whole gospel is focused and confronting us with the reality that our lives just now are short.

And they're all heading towards a departure. And that departure is the thing that matters for all of us and especially for Jesus.

[2 : 32] It's brilliant to think about his arrival. And we're going to be looking at that today all the time. He is thinking about your departure. And that's brought before us very powerfully in the account that we read here about Simeon.

Because as we read these verses, we see Simeon rejoicing at the arrival of Jesus. But all of that's tied to Simeon's departure.

As he says in verse 29, Lord, now you're letting your servant depart in peace. So today we're thinking about Jesus' arrival, Simeon's departure.

And all of that, I hope we'll see, is getting us to the heart of what the gospel is about. And it's getting us to the heart of stuff that all of us need to think about.

We're going to look at it under two main headings. We're going to look at what Simeon knew. And we're going to look at what Simeon didn't know. What Simeon knew and what Simeon didn't know.

[3 : 41] So first of all, thinking about what Simeon knew. And one of the fascinating things about Simeon, we don't know much about him. But one thing that's clear is that he clearly knew more than the people who were around him.

When you go through the gospels, you see that again and again and again, Jesus gets misunderstood by the people who are around him. And there's even moments when Mary and Joseph don't quite understand what Jesus has come to do.

And we saw that as we read through to the end of the chapter when Jesus was 12 years old. They didn't understand what Jesus was saying when he said, Did you not know that I would be at my father's house? Many people misunderstood Jesus back in the New Testament and still today.

But not Simeon. And the words that he speaks in this section reveal to us that he knows more than most about who Jesus is.

And about why he's come. And that shouldn't surprise us at all because verse 25 tells us that the Holy Spirit was upon him. And one of the things that the Holy Spirit does when he comes upon us is he opens our eyes to see the truth and helps us to understand more about what God wants us to know.

[5 : 00] So Simeon knows more than the people who are around him. What was it that he knew? Well, I want to highlight five things that we see in these verses. Number one, Simeon knew that Israel needed the Christ.

You see that in verse 26 that it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he did not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. Now when you hear that word Christ, you should be thinking of the word anointed.

That's what the word Christ means. So you should be thinking the word anointed. And when you hear the word anointed in the Bible, you should be thinking of three things. You should be thinking of prophet, priest and king.

These were three key roles in the Old Testament. And all of them involved being anointed to these offices. So when you hear the word Christ, think anointed.

When you hear anointed, think prophet, priest and king. And the Christ was the one promised in the Old Testament who would come and fulfill these roles.

[6 : 03] And Israel desperately needed that. Because they had lost the kingdom centuries earlier. When you get towards the end of the Old Testament, that's the culmination of it.

The kingdom is lost as they're conquered by the Babylonians. And now it's no longer the Babylonians who rule them. It's the Romans. But it's still foreigners.

Ever since the end of the Old Testament, they'd lost their independence. The kingdom had been conquered. The prophets had gone silent. But Zechariah and Malachi 400 years ago were the final Old Testament prophets.

For 400 years, nothing. Silence. And the priesthood was a mess. In that period, in between the Old Testament and the New Testament, we call it the intertestamental period, there was a whole lot of corruption and chaos in relation to both how Israel's nation was being ruled, lots of conflicts, lots of rival family groups.

And the priesthood had become a mess, full of corruption. Different groups were vying for power. So by the time Simeon is alive, the kingdom has been lost, the prophets are silent, the priesthood is a mess.

[7 : 25] And Simeon knew that all of that desperately needed to change. He knew that Israel desperately needed a prophet to give them God's truth.

They needed a priest to restore a right relationship with God. And they needed a king to rule and defend them.

They desperately needed God's anointed saviour. Simeon knew that they needed the Christ. Second thing that Simeon knew was that the saviour was coming soon. Simeon knew that the saviour was coming soon.

This had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. And Simeon joins Elizabeth and Zechariah and Mary and Joseph and a few others to whom God speaks in order to announce that the saviour is coming.

So there are a few who know that Jesus is coming. And Simeon is one of them. And for Simeon, all of that's tied to his departure, as we've been seeing.

[8 : 23] He's been given this promise that he will not see death until he sees the saviour. And at long, long last, the moment has come. Simeon meets the Christ that he has been waiting for.

And as his words declare, God has kept his word. He's saying that now you're letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

Simeon's eyes have seen the saviour. Number three, Simeon knew that this Christ was not just for Israel.

And that's a crucial point to recognise. Throughout the whole Old Testament, God's saving purposes have been global. It's been for the whole world. And the covenant established with Abraham way back in Genesis 12 came with the promise that through Abraham and through his descendants, all the nations of the world are going to be blessed.

So although Israel is the chosen nation through which God's savings purposes are going to be revealed in that Old Testament period, it was never intended to be just for Israel.

[9 : 36] It was always a plan of salvation for all people. Simeon knew that, but most of the people around him didn't. Most of the people around him saw themselves as the favoured nation.

And everybody else, everyone who was a foreigner, was an enemy. Many around Simeon wanted the Christ to come and they wanted the Christ to scatter the foreigners.

But what God actually wanted was for the Christ to gather them. Simeon knew that. His song speaks beautifully, his words speak beautifully, in verse 32, about how this saviour is a light for revelation to the Gentiles.

And the truth is, that is everything that Israel was always meant to be. Israel was always meant to be a light to the nations. And this is part of the many ways in which the New Testament reveals that Jesus is actually the one who fulfills everything that Israel was meant to be in the Old Testament.

And this is explaining to us why Israel has that special function and place in God's redemptive plan. In the Old Testament, Israel is functioning as a shadow, or as what we would call a type.

[10 : 58] Something that's looking forward and pointing forward to the full reality. So in the Old Testament, you have the family nation of Israel, and that's functioning as a shadow of the true family of God, the church of Jesus Christ.

Simeon is recognising this, that the shadow in the Old Testament is being fulfilled in the New. Now, a lot of people have different views on this, but my own view and the main view among Reformed churches, of which we are part of, would say that this is why God's purposes are now not focused on the political nation of Israel in the same way that they were in the Old Testament.

And what happens in the Middle East is not of prominent eschatological significance in the way that some argue it would be, because we're saying that the Old Testament, Israel, is now fulfilled in the church, because the promise was always for the nations.

God's purposes are now fulfilled through the church, where Jew and Gentile are united together, one body, one family, fellow citizens, as saints and members of the household of God.

Simeon knew this. He saw that the Christ was not just for Israel. Number four, Simeon knew that conflict lay ahead.

[12:25] And you see that when he speaks about, in verses 34 and 35, he says, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel.

And this, again, is a crucial insight that shows that Simeon knew and understood more than the people around him, because many people around Simeon expected the Christ to cause the rise of Israel and the fall of the Romans.

That was their big hope. And so for the people at the time of Simeon, that was the big problem. The Israel, Jerusalem, it's under Roman rule. And so the big hope is that the Messiah, the Christ is going to come, and he's going to cause the nation of Israel to rise again, and the Romans are going to fall.

And we will have our independent state once again. But Simeon knew that that's not what's going to happen. Simeon knows that the conflict and controversy is going to come within the people of Israel.

It's the fall and rising of many in Israel. And in particular, conflict is going to come among the religious leadership.

[13:45] And that's exactly what you see in the Gospels. Because it's the religious leaders in Israel, they're the ones who resented Jesus. They're the ones who opposed him. And ultimately, they're the ones who crucified him.

And at the same time, they're also the ones that Jesus criticizes most sharply. So if you look and you read on in the Gospels, Jesus says hardly anything about the Romans.

And yet he's constantly calling out the distorted and damaging mindset of the religious leaders within Israel.

He exposed that hypocrisy. And just as Simeon says, although they had an outward appearance of piety and superiority, the true state of their hearts gets exposed.

You see at the end of 35, that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed. Isn't that what Jesus did? He went around and he saw the religious leaders and they had all the outward appearance of piety and superiority and religious conformity.

[14:56] Jesus saw straight through it all into their hearts. And he exposed their hearts. He exposed their hypocrisy. And at the same time, Jesus would reach to those who are at the very bottom of society.

So he healed the sick. He helped the poor. He touched the leper. He welcomed those who were rejected. And he loved those who were despised.

And so in other words, Jesus' ministry would frequently turn all of the religious, social, and cultural expectations of Israel upside down.

The rising and falling is not the rise of Israel and the fall of the Romans. The rising and falling is within Israel. Jesus is turning everything upside down. He was the friend of tax collectors and sinners.

He was the one who said that if you want to lead well, you've actually got to be a servant. You've actually got to be ready to wash one another's feet. He says, The last shall be first. And the first shall be last.

[15:56] The powerful who thought they were at the top, they were the ones who were in for a fall. And the poor and the broken and those who'd made a total mess of their lives at the bottom, they were going to be lifted up.

So Simeon knew that Israel needed the Christ. Simeon knew that the Savior was coming soon. Simeon knew that this Christ is not just for Israel. Simeon knew that conflict lay ahead. And number five, Simeon knew that suffering was on its way.

And that's revealed in what he says to Mary in verse 35. A sword will pierce her soul as well. And that's exactly what happened. The Mary who carried her baby into the temple in chapter two would go on to see wave after wave of controversy and criticism of her son.

She'd experience confusion and tension herself as she tried to figure out why he'd come and what he was going to do. And ultimately, she would stand in front of the cross and watch him be crucified and die.

Simeon knew that the days ahead were not going to be easy. If the Christ was going to complete his mission, then it meant walking down a path that inevitably leads to great suffering.

[17:20] So, it's amazing what Simeon knew. In just a few verses, so much is revealed.

He has a level of understanding that stands out from the people who are around him and from the other people that you encounter as you read through the gospel. And what Simeon knew transformed his departure.

What Simeon knew transformed his departure. In other words, he knew he was ready to die. Now, now your servant can depart in peace.

And as we think about all of that, it prompts a crucial question. Do you know what Simeon knew? Do you know what he knew?

Do you know that you need the Christ as well? All of us do. All of us need the Christ. Actually, what's maybe more accurate to ask is that do you know that you need the right Christ in your life, the true Christ in your life?

[18:39] And the reason I ask that, because as we were saying, that word Christ points to the biblical offices of prophet, priest, and king. And when you hear phrases like prophet, priest, and king, it can sound a wee bit like technical theological language, and it can sound a million miles from your own life, and it all can seem a wee bit abstract, maybe even a bit irrelevant.

But the truth is, prophet, priest, and king, these are describing the three biggest influences in your life. These are describing the three biggest influences in your life, because everybody's got prophets.

Everyone's got priests. Everyone's got a king. Some people choose the prophetic voice of social media, and whatever is being said, whatever is being said to you, whatever you've been asked to do, that's what you're going to do.

Sometimes it's the prophetic voice of a secular ideology, or political party, or maybe the most powerful one of all is simply what other people think.

That as you go through your life, like what you wear, what phone you have, what you ask for for Christmas, what you hope to achieve in the next year of your life, it all actually comes back to a fear of what other people think.

[19:59] If so, that's the prophet in your life. It's telling you what you need to do. And it can be such a powerful voice. People also constantly choose priests, but when we choose the wrong priest, it just means that you've been asked to sacrifice the wrong thing.

And so the priest of get to the top of your career is going to get you to sacrifice time with your family, because you just need to spend a few more hours at work, and just need to make sure that you get this done, and better days will be ahead.

Right now, there's no time to spend with the kids. The priest of pornography is going to tell you to sacrifice your personal purity. Just have another look.

The priest of more money is going to tell you to sacrifice your contentment, because no matter how much we get, it's never enough. We choose the wrong priests, and it means we sacrifice the wrong thing.

And people choose the wrong king, because all of the time we allow ourselves to be ruled by money, or by our possessions, by our success, by people's opinions, or by anxieties.

[21 : 09] And these kings will rule over you, but they will never defend you. Instead, they leave you exposed. We desperately need the real Christ.

We desperately need Jesus as the prophet, priest, and king in our lives. Do you know that he's actually come? Now maybe you say, of course I do. I know that he was born 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem.

I've known that my whole life. It's not actually what I mean. Do you know that he's actually come here today to meet you? Do you know that that's why he's brought you here?

To meet with him. To hear his voice. Do you know, like Simeon knew, that he is for everyone? Now for Simeon, the big division was Jew and Gentile.

We don't struggle with that same question in the same way. We struggle with a different question. We think, yes, Jesus is for everyone, except for those who aren't really good enough.

[22 : 24] Except for those who've messed up too much, made too many mistakes. I don't know enough. That I'm different to everybody else. but you've got to know that he's come for everyone.

That no one's excluded. No matter what your story, no matter what your circumstances are, he has come for everyone. He's come for you. And do you know that everyone will either rise or fall before him?

Everyone will either rise or fall before him. That's ultimately where history is going to take us.

And either we will exalt ourselves and reject him and push Jesus away, or we'll bow down before him and trust him. If we do the first, if we reject him, we'll fall.

If we bow down before him and trust him, we will rise. If we're trusting him, then it's safe to depart.

[23 : 35] If we reject him, then it's not. And do you know that the agony of his death is the key to eternal life? The sword that pierced Mary's soul and the cross that crushed Jesus in agony, that cross is actually the key to our salvation.

it's through that cross that we're saved. And this is, again, where we come back to, this is what we absolutely have to think about so much, because you might think, yeah, I know that.

But the big, big question is, do you know it as in, not just like, I'm aware of it, I'm aware that Jesus died and rose again, and I'm aware of it.

that's just to be aware of it, but to know it is to know that that was for me, and it's my only hope. And a lot of people, you'll struggle with the question, am I really a Christian?

Am I really a Christian? And we apply all sorts of criteria to that question where we think, well, I don't know enough, I haven't changed enough, I'm not in the same category as other people.

[24 : 45] All of that's the wrong question to ask. Are you a Christian? How do you know the answer to that question? Well, look at the cross and tell me what you're seeing. And if you're looking at the cross and you're thinking, that is my only hope, then if you can say that you're a Christian, that's what it means to trust in Jesus, to say that cross is my only hope.

There's loads I don't know, there's loads I need to learn, and there's loads that I wish was different, but I know that I need Jesus and he's my only hope. that's what makes you a Christian.

And that's what I want you to ask yourself and think about. Do you know what Simeon knew? There's also, however, stuff that Simeon didn't know, and this will be very quick.

I just want to suggest three things that Simeon didn't know. The first two, I'm pretty sure he didn't know them. The third one, he definitely didn't know. Number one, I don't think Simeon knew just how bad the suffering would be.

So he knew that conflict lay ahead, but I don't think he knew just how severe that was going to be.

[26 : 05] we know more than he did. because we can read of how Jesus was betrayed by one of those who was closest to him.

We can read of Jesus' sweat falling to the ground like drops of blood as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. We can read of the crown of thorns pressed into his head and blood ran down his feet.

We can read of a whip scourging his back. We can read of him being hit and spat upon and mocked. We can read of him being nailed to a cross, hung to die as slowly and as agonisingly as possible.

We can read of him crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? We know way more than Simeon knew. But we don't know it all.

Because the cross took Jesus to the very depths of physical pain and spiritual agony. On the cross he took everything that our sin deserves. Every ounce of God's righteous wrath, his holy wrath, poured out upon him.

[27 : 08] All the agony of an eternity in hell experienced by Christ as he hung in the darkness. The agony, the sorrow, the emptiness, the distress, the darkness, the horror.

We don't know what that was like. And it's beyond what we can describe. We don't know what it was like. We just know who it was for.

It was for you. Second thing that Simeon didn't know is that I don't think he knew just how big this baby was going to be.

Now I don't mean in terms of weight. I mean in terms of importance. So he knew that this baby was the one that they'd been waiting for and longing for and praying for. He knew it was the Christ but I'm not sure that he knew that as he held this baby he was holding God the Son himself.

And I'm not sure that he knew that this baby would grow to be the image of the invisible God the radiance of his glory the exact imprint of his nature and the one through whom all things were created the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power.

[28 : 15] I'm not sure he knew that this baby would grow to be the man who would come and inaugurate God's kingdom who would build the church of Jesus Christ and that the lives of millions and millions and millions of people would be utterly transformed by everything that this child would accomplish.

And I don't think that Simeon knew that 2,000 years after Luke 2 3,700 miles away there would be people gathering in Stornoway so that the first thing that we do as a new week begins is to meet in Jesus' name and to worship him and praise him for everything that he has done.

Simeon didn't know all that. We know more than he did. We can look at the rest of the New Testament. We can look at 2,000 years of church history. We can look at the church across the world today and we can look at our lives and say Jesus has done amazing, amazing things.

We know way more than Simeon knew but we don't know it all because Jesus is continuing to do his mighty work and we don't know yet who's going to be sitting in these pews in a year's time.

We don't know yet who's going to be brought to faith as the Holy Spirit works in this town. We don't know how the church is going to be built in years to come but Jesus is going to do it.

[29 : 31] He's going to continue his work. There's so much more to come. That's why we should be so excited about all that Jesus is still doing and that he will do.

So I don't think that Simeon knew how bad the suffering would be and I don't think he knew how big and significant this child would be but thirdly when it comes to Simeon's departure I am absolutely certain that Simeon had no idea just how amazing it would be.

Simeon says so beautifully now I can depart in peace. He's ready to die. He's ready for eternity. He's ready to depart but at that moment as he speaks those words he has no idea just how amazing the destination is going to be.

And that's maybe something that we just don't speak about enough. The fact that the future promised for the Lord's people the new creation the new heavens and the new earth is just amazing.

And we should think and speak about it more because the Bible reveals a lot to us about it. It speaks to us of a place of majestic glory.

[30 : 57] Revelation 21 speaks of the glory of the Lord in the new Jerusalem in the new creation. It's radiance like a most rare jewel like jasper clear as crystal.

You imagine the most beautiful stunning glimmering sights you've seen. That's a picture of the glory awaiting us. It's a place of astounding beauty.

Revelation 21 again the wall of the city was built a jasper the city was pure gold like clear glass. The fountains of the walls of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper second sapphire third agate fourth emerald the fifth onyx sixth carnelian seventh chrysolite eighth beryl ninth topaz tenth chrysoprase eleventh jacinth twelfth amethyst amethyst stunning absolutely stunning.

It's also a place of magnificent togetherness that there there is a great multitude that no one could number from every nation all tribes people languages standing before the throne together.

all the time in our lives just now we experience the agony of separation the promise of our future is a place of unbreakable togetherness it's a place of perfect healing he'll wipe away every tear from your eyes death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore it's a place of unspoiled holiness a place of thrilling worship where the volume of praise is going to be incredible as we lift up our voices to praise Jesus and it's going to be a place of unending love that nothing can separate you from Romans 8 38 neither life nor death nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and everything good and precious and wonderful that we experience in this life everything good and precious that you experience this week this week will be a great week for so many of us everything that's good and precious and wonderful is a glimpse it's a glimpse of what God is preparing for his people

[33 : 16] Simeon was about to depart he did not know just how amazing the destination was going to be he knows now he knows now and for us we cannot stretch our minds far enough to imagine the peace and the joy and the security and the beauty and wonder of what God has prepared for those who love him we can't stretch our minds far enough to imagine that but if you're trusting in Jesus you're going to find out you're going to find out and as we close surely surely that's the departure that everyone here wants to have surely that's the departure that you want that's the departure that

Jesus came to give you we're thinking about his arrival he's thinking about your departure and he's holding out the offer to all of us that if we trust in him that departure will be unspeakably amazing but all of this comes back to what we said to the kids there's an inescapable connection between going and knowing if that's the departure that we want if that's the destination where we want to go Jesus is the saviour that all of us need to know I hope that every single person in here can take

Simeon's words to be their own that I your servant can depart in peace Amen let's pray Lord Jesus we just thank you so so much for everything that you've done for us we thank you for your arrival for everything that it means for everything that it accomplished for everything that you have changed for us and we thank you that in your arrival you were thinking about our departure we thank you that you have opened up a way for life for all who come to you and so we pray that every single one of us would look to you trust in you and follow you help us and guide us and thank you for everything Amen we're going to close singing from

Psalm 4 in the Sing Psalms version and that's on page 4 and we'll sing verses 3 to 8 know that the Lord has set apart the godly as his own the Lord will hear me when I call and my request make known and down to the end I will lie down and sleep in peace my heart will rest secure for you alone oh gracious Lord will keep me safe and sure 3 to 8 to God's praise know that the Lord has set apart the godly as his own the Lord will hear me when

I hope and thy request may know in anger do not pray God's law consider and be still still is it a righteous sacrifice and wait upon his will oh who can show!

[38 : 25] any earth I hear so many say O Lord shine on us with your light show us your face face I pray you filled my heart with greater joy than others may have found as they rejoice!

that harvest when green white above will lie and sleep in peace my heart will in peace heart will lie down sleep in and sleep peace my heart will rest secure for you alone O Lord will keep me safe and true after the benediction the main door as you step week may the grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen up up up!

up up up up up!

up up up up up up! up up! up!